



# RESEARCH BRIEF

## CIVIC SERVICE RESEARCH GRANTS AND FELLOWS PROGRAM

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### National Youth Service

The cancellation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Global IANYS Conference scheduled for June 21 - 27, 2006 in Montreal, Canada, led many CSD Research Fellows to express their support to IANYS and Katimavik. Many also voiced their opinions on the current state of national service policy. A common theme emerging in these communications was the need to secure funding and resources for organizations that promote youth service. It was suggested that if our research can demonstrate the benefits of service to society, politicians and funders might change their perceptions by developing and supporting policies that promote these programs.

In this section, we share findings from our CSD Fellows' research as it relates to national youth service in their respective countries. Current studies on youth service policy provide valuable information that addresses not only the server's experience but also the role of government in policy-creation and promotion of youth service programs.

Youth service in the United States has gained special attention during the Bush administration. Unforeseen events such as the terrorists' attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> revived the national debate on whether volunteer programs and the federal government's role in building civic capacity should be expanded.

Although youth service is one issue that enjoys broad public support, it certainly does not fall into the category of "hot" public issues such as health care, old age pensions, and tax cuts. In addition, Bass (2003) writes that the personal presidential investments, which promote the funding of government sponsored volunteer organizations makes these programs a convenient target of presidential opponents and budget cuts. For example, in February, 2006, the proposed White House budget slated to cut AmeriCorps by 5% and Learn & Serve by 8%, and to terminate the National Civilian Community Corps (Voices for National Service, 2006).

In her research, Dr. Danielle Vogenbeck investigated the relationship between the AmeriCorps \*National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and its non-profit partners by focusing on community impacts and using a social network analysis approach to measure social capital. She also focused on how public policy can support nonprofit-government partnerships.

Dr. Vogenbeck evaluated four communities that have partnered with the AmeriCorps\* NCCC. Changes to the social network structure of the communities in terms of weak ties, bridges, and structural holes were also assessed. The results show that NCCC had a positive effect on the development of strong partnerships in the third sector. NCCC was also effective at fostering the development of weak ties, bridges, and structural holes in communities that have high levels of trust, information flow, and highly active network connections. Dr. Vogenbeck's report is forthcoming.

In Europe, AVSO's study entitled "Development of Transnational Youth Voluntary Service in the European Union: A Comparison of Programme and Policy Development in Germany, Italy and France", focused on youth service as a guiding principle for domestic policy. The authors concluded that despite public support for youth service programs from the European community, the different frameworks for voluntary youth service present many administrative obstacles to programs' implementation and sustainability. The findings suggest that sharing existing "best practices" in different European countries increases voluntary civic service opportunities for young people and the development of policy aimed to address general welfare, citizenship, and job skills.

In Africa, two descriptive studies provide opportunity for follow up and further research. Dr. Ebenezer Obadare completed his study on the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria in 2003. The duration of national service for all participants in the NYSC is one year and participation in the Scheme is mandatory for Nigerian youth recently graduating from high school and university. Using data from open-ended interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions, the study traced the ways in which political forces have affected the implementation of the NYSC. One of the main conclusions of this study was that NYSC failed to achieve many of its goals because of the national government's inability to connect citizenship to the NYSC experience. Similarly, Donald Eberly (1997) argues that, to encourage young people to serve, the NYS should be placed within the framework of a citizenship responsibility by giving servers a choice between military and civic service.

Another CSD Research Fellow, Wale Adebaniwi is conducting a study on the Technical Aids Corps (TAC) Scheme established by Nigeria in 1987. The main focus of this study is to determine the impact of TAC on volunteers, including their motivations to serve and how the program changed their perceptions of citizenship and civic service. Adebaniwi has conducted interviews with program staff, officials from government departments, former participants, serving members of the Scheme and members of the host institutions in Nigeria and Gambia. Initial interviews generated compelling information related to volunteers' perceptions of service. Servers tend to be ambivalent about the value of the program and many do not perceive their time served as civic duty. Many of the servers interviewed also expressed that they did not receive fair compensation for the time served and the "sacrifice" they made for their nation. In his last progress report, Adebaniwi also noted that socio-economic factors might have contributed to some of these views; economic hardships might lead servers to expect more compensation from the government. The results of this research will also help reveal the opinions of government agencies and government officials about the program. Adebaniwi's research is still underway.

### REFLECTION ON THE CONTENT IN THIS ISSUE

**Please email other fellows to discuss your ideas or reactions.**

- ◇ In your opinion, what areas of research are needed to develop a knowledge base on national youth service?
- ◇ How can results from current research on youth service be disseminated to produce meaningful policy impact?
- ◇ What is the role of government in the sustainability of national youth programs?
- ◇ What strategies do you think are the most effective when structuring organizations that promote youth service (i.e. IANYS)? For example, where should financial support come from for these organizations (i.e., member states, programs, and individuals)?

## Tips for Conducting Focus Groups

Several of CSD's Research Fellows are currently conducting focus groups in their research. Please feel free to share this information with your research team and focus group moderators. (For references, please see "Works Cited in this Issue" on page 6)

### **Goals of Focus Groups:**

- To collect information about a range of ideas and perceptions. The aim should be not to reach consensus or agreement but to gather different perspectives on an issue and provide insights about how people perceive a situation.
- To create a social context in which participants' comments are influenced by interaction with several people.

### **Participants:**

- Focus groups should consist of at least four but no more than ten people; seven is the ideal number of participants. The gatherings should be small enough to give everyone an opportunity to share insights but large enough to ensure diversity.
- Participants should have a common identifier (i.e. community leaders, volunteers, etc).
- When selecting participants, the researcher should account for the interaction among members of certain groups based on demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, income, age, etc). Some interactions may produce threats to validity such as social desirability and internal rivalry.
- Some non-random sampling techniques available to researchers for selecting participants in a focus group include: snow ball sampling, convenience sampling, and purposive sampling.

### **Questions:**

- Participants should feel free to explain their answers. Questions are open-ended; avoid yes/no questions.
- Use probing follow-up questions: "What influenced your answer?" or "Say more about that."
- Encourage alternative points of view: "Does anyone feel differently?" or "Are there other points of view?"

### **Conducting Focus Groups:**

- Welcome and introduce participants to each other, give an overview of the topic, and establish ground rules for the group such as speaking one at a time.
- Discuss confidentiality issues, tape recording, and taking notes before starting the focus group.
- Let participants know that there are no right or wrong answers and that you are interested in both positive and negative comments.
- Encourage participants to share their point of view even if it is different from what others have said.
- The ability and willingness of focus group participants to share their knowledge is influenced by the length of focus groups; two hours is considered the maximum time frame for conducting effective focus groups.

### **Data Collection:**

- Research staff should be adequately trained on the data standards, institutional policies, and sponsors' requirements relevant to the research project.
- After the focus group, conduct immediate post-collection coding for time/memory sensitive data.
- Variables and measures, document coding, form protocols and administrative database specifications must be defined prior to data collection.
- Useful techniques to avoid missing data include tape recording focus groups, performing real time data entry and editing, and interviewing moderators.
- Incomplete, missing or unusable data should be corrected immediately.
- For reporting purposes results from the data collected should be guided by the hypotheses in the analysis plan and an attempt should be made to use participants' words, phrases, and actual quotes.

## Conferences

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### **International Society for Third Sector Research 7th International Conference. Civil Society and Human Security Conference, July 9-12, 2006, Bangkok, Thailand.**

This year the conference will focus on the role of religion, social movements, governance and multi-sector partnerships. Other topics include civic participation, community development and citizenship, and the application of research-based knowledge to policy and practice. Many of our Fellows will be presenting at the CSHSC conference! More information is available at <http://www.istr.org/conferences/bangkok/>

### **The National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO) and Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN). Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference, September 13-14, 2006, University of Warwick, UK.**

This conference provides a forum for discussing a whole range of voluntary sector themes including philanthropy and giving, public service delivery, civil renewal, active citizenship, public policy, ICT, funding and infrastructure. This year, the conference includes a special session sponsored by the Institute of Volunteering Research for “new” researchers. More information is available at [http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/research\\_conference](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/research_conference)

### **The 6<sup>th</sup> International Service Learning Research Conference, October 14-16, 2006, Portland State University, OR.**

"From Passion to Objectivity: International and Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Service-Learning Research." This year's conference will continue to encourage research on service-learning and engaged scholarship, and greater involvement from international scholars. More information is available at <http://www.upa.pdx.edu/SLResearch06>.

### **The 6<sup>th</sup> CIVICUS World Assembly: Acting Together for a Just World, June 21-25, 2006 Glasgow, Scotland.**

Over a thousand researchers, delegates, and activists from more than 100 countries are expected to participate. A range of plenary sessions and more than 100 workshops were organised by members. More information is available at <http://www.civicusassembly.org>

### **The 19th IAVE World Volunteer Conference, November 10-14, 2006, New Delhi, India.**

The Conference will be organized around 6 major tracks: spirituality; human rights; environment; education and governance in multi-cultural societies; information communication technologies (ICT), media & advertising; and civil society intervention as volunteer action. More information is available at <http://www.iave.org/2006>

### **The 35<sup>th</sup> Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) Conference, November 16-18, 2006, Chicago, IL.**

The theme for the ARNOVA Conference this year is "Voluntary Action and Government: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizations, Philanthropy, and Public-Private Relations". Organizers will post the preliminary conference schedule and registration materials in August. Please reference the ARNOVA website for updates: <http://www.arnova.org>.

### **The National Service-Learning Conference, March 28-31, 2007, Albuquerque, New Mexico.**

The National Service-Learning Conference is the largest gathering of youths and practitioners involved in the service-learning movement. The conference connects participants with service-learning leaders through three days of plenary sessions, featured forums, and service projects. More information is available at [http://www.nylc.org/happening\\_event.cfm?oid=5194&null=1147547211506](http://www.nylc.org/happening_event.cfm?oid=5194&null=1147547211506)



## Publications, Presentations, and Announcements

**Dr. Alvino Fantini** presented his research, “Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence” at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Interim Report of the Federation of EIL’s Research Project General Assembly Meeting. The meeting was held at the end of March 2006, in Salvador, Brazil. His research explores the impact of intercultural volunteer service on youth participants. The initial pilot study concentrates on British and Swiss volunteers in Ecuadorian programs and the impact of service on their intercultural competence and lifestyle choices.

**Dr. Justin Davis Smith** served as the keynote speaker for the National Volunteering Research Symposium and conference in Melbourne, Australia this past March.

**Peter Devereux** presented his research on “International Volunteers in Community Science for Sustainable Development,” at the March 2006 National Volunteering Research Symposium and Conference in Melbourne, Australia. He has also submitted for publication a paper detailing his current research in the *Australian Journal of Volunteering*.

**Dr. Fares Howari, Dr. Cheryl Keen & Ms. Tara Hopkins** will be participating in a cross-national showcase entitled, “Service-Learning Forms, Models, and Effects: A Comparison across Three Countries” at the Sixth International Service-Learning Research Conference to be held October 2006 in Portland, OR. The session will be convened by **Ms. Suzanne Pritzker** of the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University in St. Louis.

**Dr. Anabel Cruz & Ms. Lucia Perez Bruzzone’s** abstract, “Human Security and Social Participation: Much More than a Mere Link”, has been accepted for presentation at the 7<sup>th</sup> ISTR International Conference. Ms. Perez Bruzzone will also be presenting her research at the CIVICUS World Assembly on June 21, 2006 in Glasgow, Scotland.

A new book, “Service Without Guns” by **Donald Eberly & Reuven Gal** is now available. The authors investigate the commonalities between military service and National Youth Service (NYS) programs; similarities in their impacts on participants; and the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction of NYS initiatives alongside military service. They also highlight the strengths of



NYS and the increased importance of NYS programs in the future. The book includes a guest chapter by **Dr. Michael Sherraden** on the strengths of NYS as policy. The book is currently available for download at <http://www.lulu.com>

“Civic Service Worldwide: Impacts and Inquiry”, a book edited by **Dr. Amanda McBride & Dr. Michael Sherraden** and published by ME Sharpe will be available in November 2006. With contributions from several CSD Research Fellows, the book investigates the meaning and impact of civic service across nations and cultures. <http://www.mesharpe.com/mall/resultsa.asp?Title=Civic+Service+Worldwide%3A+Impacts+and+Inquiry>

**Dr. Ebenezer Obadare** has recently accepted a tenure track assistant professor position at the University of Kansas in the Sociology Department. Congratulations, Dr. Obadare!

**Dr. Teresa Matus** is currently leading the Academic Commission of the World Congress of Schools of Social Work scheduled to take place on August 28–31 in Chile, Santiago. The three main areas of research for the 2006 World Conference are: globalization and social work; citizenship; and the strengthening of the civil society.

**Dr. Amanda Moore McBride** accepted an appointment as the director of the Richard A. Gephardt Institute for Public Service at Washington University in Saint Louis, effective May 2006. The Gephardt Institute for Public Service is a non-partisan institute created to implement programs that encourage university students, alumni, and older citizens to become involved in public service.

CSD is pleased to announce our newest Research Fellows: Dr. Drew Smith at the Leadership Center at the Morehouse College & Dr. Stephanie Boddie of the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. Their research “Civic Service in Lesotho: Local Sources and U.S. Connections” begins July, 2006. Please help us welcome Dr. Smith and Dr. Boddie to our network!

On March 13, 2006, Youth Service America (YSA) hosted a meeting in Washington, DC on National and Community Service. The event provided a discussion forum on youth service and the development of effective strategies for engaging foster care youth in community service. The results of this meeting are available online in YSA's periodical, Youth Service Journal [http://www.ysa.org/program/ys\\_journal.cfm](http://www.ysa.org/program/ys_journal.cfm)



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#### “Tips on How to Conduct Focus Groups”

Adapted from a handout prepared by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center: *Practitioner Research as Staff Development*. Available at <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/research/introduction.htm>

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